



SPRING REPORT 2021

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The start of 2021 has not been easy for many Londoners, with almost continuous lockdown since the start of the year and with many across London not being able to work, having to home-school and struggling with the direct and indirect impacts of the continued COVID-19 pandemic.

However, I am hopeful that as we move towards summer things will return to some form of normality if we continue to follow the rules and exercise caution.

Since Christmas I have continued to work hard, albeit remotely, to hold the Mayor to account and raise issues of importance to Londoners, this update covers some of my key work since the beginning of the year.

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The Mayor's Budget—A Missed Opportunity

There is no doubt that the budget this year was set in very difficult circumstances, but I voted against the Mayor's final budget for a number of key reasons:

1. There was nothing in the budget for the many leaseholders in London caught up in the cladding and fire safety scandal, despite measures the Mayor could take, at relatively low cost, to support them;
2. We also needed to see investment focussed on a return to community

policing, including protecting our police front counters, to rebuild public confidence, which continues to fall;

3. The lack of consideration of road pricing showed a lack of ambition or desire from the Mayor to use his power to make real change and continuing with the environmentally damaging and expensive Silvertown Road Tunnel is a huge waste of money and undermines the Mayor's environmental credentials;



And even with all of the uncertainties one thing was clear, the Mayor was keen to protect his own publicity budget, which was incredibly disappointing and totally the wrong call.

Government Must Publish TfL Finance Report

On March 4 I seconded a motion to the London Assembly urging the Government to publish the KPMG report that was commissioned into TfL's finances, which the Government has continuously refused to publish over recent months.

Last October London's business leaders wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport asking that the

report be published for the sake of building trust and cooperation between London and the country.

The call fell on deaf ears.



We cannot have a proper debate about TfL's finances when such an important report, paid for by the taxpayer, is being kept a secret.

I am pleased the motion passed, to ensure London is treated fairly this report must be published. But it was very telling, and frankly outrageous, that Conservative Assembly Members voted against the motion...

A Half-Baked Response to Cladding and Fire Safety



In January I joined Cllr Rabina Khan (pictured above) at a virtual meeting with a large group of leaseholders affected by the building safety scandal in Tower Hamlets.

They shared the huge impact of the scandal on their lives, something which is replicated across London.

In January Cllr Luisa Porritt, Cllr Hina Bokhari and I met with both UK Finance and the Regulator for Social Housing.

The purpose of these meetings were twofold. We wanted to understand the challenges for housing associations and lenders, but we also wanted to lobby on behalf of the thousands of innocent London leaseholders trapped in dangerous buildings facing crippling bills.

The meetings were useful and helped form the set of measures the London Lib Dems and I have been pushing the Mayor of London to take

to support leaseholders in London, given the lack of sufficient Government action. Which are:

1. Stop working with developers who refuse to take action to support leaseholders in existing stock they have built.
2. Look at becoming the insurer of last resort in London for EWS1 assessors who were struggling to get professional indemnity insurance.
3. Trial a fire safety risk assessment register in London for residential properties.

Despite continued attempts to get him to introduce these measures the Mayor is yet to do so.



Then in February the Government made a further announcement, which many were hoping would finally remove the unfair financial burden placed on leaseholders.

The measures were wholly unsatisfactory and continue to leave thousands facing debt and huge costs for years to come.

The battle to end this scandal continues!

LGBT+ History Month



February was LGBT+ History month. LGBT+ Londoners have made, and continue to make a huge contribution to our city which should be both recognised and celebrated.

Yet, despite progress in recent years there is still so much more to do to

tackle homophobia, transphobia and all LGBT+ discrimination, especially with hate crime levels increasing in London.

The month also serves as a reminder that there is still no national memorial in Britain to commemorate and

remember the impact of HIV and AIDS on so many. That is why I am proud to be a patron of the AIDS Memory UK Campaign which is working towards a memorial in London.

I will keep being the best ally I can be.

"An emergency services cenotaph in central London would be a place to reflect, remember and honour the sacrifices made by so many."

999 Emergency Services Cenotaph

I was pleased to present a motion to the London Assembly plenary meeting on 4 February supporting the campaign for a national emergency services cenotaph in central London. I was also delighted that it passed unanimously!

Although there are memorials for some emergency service workers and volunteers around the UK there is

not one place to honour all of them and their importance to our country.

It is time this changed.

An emergency services cenotaph in central London would be a place to reflect, remember and honour the sacrifices made by so many during this last year, as well as honouring all who have

served in the NHS and emergency services past, present and future.



Universal Basic Income Motion Passes!

On 2 March the London Assembly's Economy Committee finally passed a motion I co-sponsored calling on the Mayor of London to look at a universal basic income trial in London.

We have seen during the pandemic more clearly than ever how fragile many people's financial circumstances are, especially here in London, where even before COVID-19 close to a third of people lived in poverty. With so many falling through the gaps during

the pandemic it's obvious that our welfare system does not work effectively enough.



YES to UBI

If a UBI had been in place before the pandemic it would have provided automatic and essential

income top-ups for those who really needed it. Ensuring people are not living hand-to-mouth does not just benefit them, but everyone.

The knowledge of a secure income will also open up opportunities to those who can't currently explore or consider the careers that they really want.

UBI will make our city a better, more equal, more productive place.

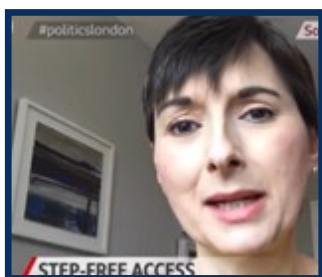
"Ensuring people have money to spend and are not living hand-to-mouth does not just benefit them, but everyone."

Accessible Transport Across London

At the beginning of this year I was pleased TfL finally agreed to include Thameslink on the Tube Map. You may wonder what this has to do with disability access, but all Thameslink stations running through central London are accessible, and with so many stations still not being step-free or truly accessible this is a particularly welcome development.

I have also continued to raise my concerns over delays to making more stations step-free. In February I was on BBC Sunday Politics London discussing the fact that the Mayor has totally failed to deliver what was promised in his 2018 Transport Strategy.

The Mayor cannot hide behind COVID-19 for the delays with step-free access before the pandemic. At the current rate we are going to be lucky to reach a third of Tube stations having step free access by 2022—The Mayor had promised we would have 40%.



In February the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) report into the tragedy at Eden Park Station in 2020, where a blind man suffered fatal injuries after falling from the edge of a platform without tactile paving, was released.

In 2021 it's wrong that one third of platforms around the country lack tactile paving. This is not an optional extra.

Response to Government's Night Flights Consultation

On 5 March I responded to the Government's consultation on night flights at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

I'm disappointed continued night flights are even being considered given the increasing scientific evidence showing the serious negative health costs of aircraft noise, which in turn have an economic cost as well.

I used my response to raise the many concerns and issues that have been raised with me by those constituents across London who have been affected and impacted by night flights.

I have worked closely with RNIB and Guide Dogs on the issue of tactile paving, writing to Network Rail with my concerns and they said they would reach 100% coverage by 2029, which is not good enough.

I also appeared on BBC Radio 4's 'In Touch' programme to discuss the issue in January.

A clear and rapid timetable for implementing critical safety improvements must be brought forward.

Safety must be a priority and I will continue pushing for a safe and accessible transport network across London.

"we are going to be lucky to reach 1/3 of Tube stations having step free access by 2022—The Mayor promised we would have 40%."



Tackling Vaccine Fraud

There is no doubt that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is the best way to protect yourself and others from the virus, but we must be mindful of vaccine fraud.

The Metropolitan Police, NHS and others have been making clear to people that when getting your COVID-19 vaccine:

1. you will not have to show ID;
2. you will not have to pay;
3. you will not be asked for any bank details;
4. you can currently only get the vaccination through the NHS;

It is important that we all safeguard against vaccine fraudsters and also look out for those more vulnerable in our communities who may be more susceptible to such scams.

#GetVaccinated



CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Roadmap Unfair on London's Museums & Galleries

London has over 200 museums and 850 galleries and hosts three of the world's top ten galleries and museums. This rich offering is a big draw to London for tourists, from both here in the UK and abroad.

I was shocked that the Government's Roadmap has museums and galleries in 'Tier 3', meaning they will not be able to open until 17 May. This is because they are being considered as

"indoor entertainment venues", despite having much more in common with public buildings such as libraries and community centres, which can open on 12 April.

On 4 March I questioned the Deputy Mayor for Culture on this and she agreed with my concerns. I have also joined London Lib Dem Mayoral Candidate, Luisa Porritt and Lib Dem Culture Spokesperson, Jamie Stone MP in writing to the Prime Minister about this issue.

It seems completely illogical and unfair that on 12 April Londoners will be able to go to the gym and for non-essential shopping, but not to a museum or art gallery.



COVID-19 — Disabled & Vulnerable Londoners

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on disabled Londoners is clear and the Government's lack of consideration for disabled individuals during the pandemic has made a difficult situation even worse. In March I called for recognition of this and action to improve the health inequalities faced by disabled Londoners.

Whether it be the lack of British Sign Language translation at UK Government briefings, the lack of support for the extremely clinically vulnerable or the fact little to no additional support has been provided to London's special educational needs schools. The lack of consideration for those with disabilities is worrying and has worsened existing health inequalities.

It's also regrettable and unacceptable that there are reports of unlawful

blanket 'Do Not Resuscitate' orders being forced on disabled people, including in some cases with no communication to patients or their loved ones.

Despite taking too long, I'm pleased Government is now prioritising all adults with learning disabilities for vaccination, following the campaigns of Ed Davey and others, who have been stressing the need for this.



In January I questioned London's Chief Nurse about ensuring vulnerable groups including the homeless, vulnerable migrants and sex workers can get vaccinated without needing to register with a GP, which is not possible

for some. I was assured work was taking place to contact these Londoners.

In February I also raised issues many blind and partially sighted Londoners face when trying to get vaccinated.

I pointed out that many blind and partially sighted Londoners were not being contacted about their vaccination in their preferred format, which risked them missing key information.

I also stressed that blind and partially sighted Londoners should be offered vaccinations at their local GP surgeries given that planning accessible and safe routes to an unfamiliar vaccination centre could be very challenging.

Any public inquiry into the handling of the pandemic must include the impact of policies on the disabled. Lessons must be learnt.